

DUTY-TIME vs. RETENTION: WHERE DOES THE SOUTHERN PLATTE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT GO?

Strategic Management of Change

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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed by this research is the element of retaining volunteer employees. Some volunteers stay as a member, but have not continued to participate in either alarm activity or training. Time that is needed in the fire service today takes great commitment from an individual. The ability of the volunteer fire service to adequately respond to the changing needs is largely a function of its administrators.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate/determine a currency requirement system that helps retain employees, while still providing a benefit to the citizens of Southern Platte Fire Protection District. This study used an evaluative research methodology. The research questions to be answered were:

- 1) What are the issues, nationwide, of why volunteer firefighters/emergency workers do not participate within their department?
- 2) Nationally, what helps retain a volunteer firefighter/emergency worker?
- 3) Under the present duty-time requirement system, within Southern Platte Fire Protection District, how has retention increased over the past year?
- 4) What should the minimum requirement be for employees that want to volunteer their time to the Southern Platte Fire Protection District?
- 5) How can this criterion be used to increase the retention of employees?

A literature review was conducted utilizing publications from the Learning Research Center (LRC) at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC). Additional literature reviews were conducted at the Lenexa (Kansas) Fire Department's Learning Resource Center (LRC), along with the Internet. Statistical analysis was conducted using data from the employees' required activity over the past year.

The findings revealed that the fire service is just putting a finger on the problem. The common thread that appeared to be found is that departments are proactive with employees at the beginning of careers and reactive when performance stops.

The study disclosed, to retain volunteers, organizations and its management must understand human wants and needs. To be successful it must use varied incentives for employees. Programs that appeared most successful showed similarities in approach and content.

From statistical analysis, it was found that the District should raise its duty-time requirement to 13.50 hours.

Recommendations included: 1) employee needs assessment and input, 2) evaluation, 3) work on present incentives, 4) develop cafeteria of enticements, 5) compliment employees, 6) implement 13.50 hour requirement, 7) continue statistics, 8) correction of inappropriate behavior, and 9) reminder of who the employees serve.

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INTRODUCTION

“They are relied on by many as the first line of defense, not only for fires, but also for emergency medical incidents, natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, water rescue emergencies, confined space emergencies and other public service calls,” (Buckman, 1998, p. 3). These are the men and women that volunteer their time to serve a community.

For all the acts of duty, heroism, and time away from family, volunteers receive little to no pay. Communities continue to call upon these individuals to come and help them in their time of need. The Southern Platte Fire Protection District’s community is not much different than the rest of the nation in its delivery of service; by volunteers.

As the organization has found it necessary to change from all volunteer to a combination department, so have some of the employees’ thoughts and actions, concerning the time commitment it takes to be a volunteer. “The age of the volunteer services’ member is younger than ever before. ... less dedication, discipline and loyalty.” (Buckman, 1990, p. 14) Therefore, the problem promoting this research is the element of retaining volunteer employees. Some volunteers stayed as a member, but have not continued to participate in either alarm activity or training sessions.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate/determine a currency requirement system that helps to retain employees, while still providing a benefit to the Southern Platte Fire Protection District and its citizens. This study uses an evaluative research methodology. The research questions to be answered are:

- 1) What are the issues, nationwide, of why volunteer firefighters/emergency workers do not continue to participate within their department?

- 2) Nationally, what helps retain a volunteer firefighter/emergency worker?
- 3) Under the present duty-time requirement system, within Southern Platte Fire Protection District, how has retention increased over the past year?
- 4) What should the minimum requirement be for employees that want to volunteer their time to the Southern Platte Fire Protection District?
- 5) How can this criterion be used to increase the retention of employees?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Southern Platte Fire Protection District is a suburban/rural fire district that borders Kansas City, Missouri. It is located in the southern and western areas of Platte County along the Missouri River, just south of the Kansas City International Airport. The District encompasses five suburban cities, one village, and unincorporated area. In Platte County there are eight other fire districts, a public safety department, along with the Kansas City Fire Department.

The district has three stations that protect 75 square miles. A population of approximately 30,000 people reside within these boundaries. The Southern Platte Fire Protection District responds to an average of 1,200 alarms per year. Roughly, 50% of the alarms are of an emergency medical nature.

The department provides a wide range of emergency and non-emergency services to the citizens. Along with the normal range of fire related alarms, personnel provide emergency medical care with the response of basic life support units. A non-profit company that serves the greater Kansas City area provides ambulance service. Other services which are provided are ice/water rescue, hazardous material response, extrication, fire code inspection and enforcement, contract response services, contract dispatch services, fire prevention activities, and any other services a patron may request. The

philosophy of the department is, if someone is in need of help or assistance, then we are going to do anything within the department's means to assist them.

In June, 1996, the District transformed into a combination department. Nine full-time firefighters were hired. These were the first full-time, on-duty, firefighters. They were hired to compliment a staff of 48 non-compensated members. In late 1998, an additional 4 firefighters will be hired.

The full-time firefighters work 24-hour shifts, then are off for 48 hours. Each shift has 3 firefighters on duty, each day. The additional employees will add one firefighter per shift with a daytime person, Monday through Friday. They all are assigned to one station, which is centrally located in the district.

In order for a volunteer employee to remain in good standing, he is required to perform a minimum of 18 hours of service per month. This service includes a minimum of 6 hours of training. The remaining 12 hours must be spent fulfilling duty-time requirements. The duty-time was setup to instill more shift coverage. The employees are encouraged to schedule their time in advance. The volunteers are also encouraged to do more time and respond when needed.

A volunteer employee can also earn duty-time hours by responding to alarms. Each alarm that a volunteer responds to equates to 1 hour of duty-time. Therefore, if a volunteer responds to 7 alarms during a month, they are still held responsible to complete 5 more hours of duty-time.

Over the past year, if an employee did not complete his/her 12 hours of duty-time, disciplinary action occurred. After the first time, a verbal warning with written documentation was issued. If a second consecutive month was missed, written documentation was issued placing the employee on special probation. With each occurrence, the employee's officer counseled the employee of the importance of participating and serving the community. After the third consecutive month of low participation, the employee was terminated.

If an employee received either a verbal warning or special probation, and successfully completed the required 12 hours the second month, the employee returned to normal status. This meant that the employee could start being deficient the following month and the disciplinary process would start over. A volunteer could take an approved leave of absence for six months, if needed.

To help deter an employee from abusing the policy and possibly only meeting the requirement 4 times a year, without being terminated, an additional reward was given to the employee. The District purchased a Length of Service Award Program for each volunteer. The program pays a monthly cash retirement, based on the years of service given to the community and organization.

With the program, the District regulates what the requirements are to achieve a year of service, which will count towards retirement. The only present requirement needed is that an employee can not have more than three disciplinary actions for duty-time against them. Therefore, if a volunteer participates nine months out of the year, he/she will receive a year of service for the program.

This paper was prepared to meet the requirements of the Strategic Management of Change course. The research presented relates to the units discussing analyzation, planning, implementing, and evaluating change.

In the analysis phase we discussed, being able to identify the organizational conditions as compared to the existing mission statement, values, norms, and standards. During the planning phase, continued discussion topics included examining the internal and external forces for and against the change, envisioning the change, selecting the methods of change, and structuring the techniques to promote it.

It has been noted by the administration that the department has not done its best at providing group envisioned goals prior to any change within the organization. As learned in the Strategic Management of

Change course, envisioned goals shared by all are better received, making change internally a little easier.

Continued communication was the key topic in the implementation phase. Discussion on the initial change evaluation, along with continuation of monitoring were the fundamental topics in the evaluation phase.

This study is a continuation of those discussions that examined the four phases of change needed to enhance the proper implementation of changing the duty-time program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The National Volunteer Fire Council notes that of the 1,073,600 estimated firefighters across the country, 807,900 are volunteers. This leaves 25% paid firefighters in the United States (National Volunteer Fire Council, 1998). Of all the localities across America, 70% are protected “in whole or in part by volunteer firefighters,” (National Volunteer Fire Council, 1996, p. xii).

Dr. Harry R. Carter (1996), Battalion Chief of Newark (New Jersey) Fire Department points out that population shifts, suburban development, and an aging society are raising the subject of fire protection service delivery. He continues to summarize that in some cases where a community wants or needs fire protection, there may not be a sufficient number of persons willing or able to serve in a volunteer capacity.

The conflicts of why adults can not meet the demands can not simply be outlined. Of the volunteers, many are parents and are between the ages of 30-45 years (Buckman, 1995). In today’s society, many adults are trying to make ends meet. This includes both parents working, some with two jobs. Along

with the struggle of competing interests, most people today have little time to spend on community activities and hobbies (Sullivan, 1997).

Dan Jennings, Vice President, Manilus Volunteer Fire Department (New York) agrees with Sullivan in saying “people aren’t volunteering as often because they have other things to do with their leisure time. More families are dependent on dual-career incomes to survive,” (Smith, 1991, p. 63).

In an article by International Fire Service Training Association, *The Voice* (1990) noted that not only are people too busy, but they are “too caught up in leisure or career pursuits, too self concerned and lacking in community spirit,” (p. 10). They continued to explain that people do not want to risk their lives, time, or energy dousing someone else’s fire for no money.

In many cases, formally rural area residents commuted to jobs in core urban areas. These residents “can’t rush home and chase fires,” (IFSTA, 1990, p. 10) Couple this with the young volunteers leaving their home towns for better jobs in the city, the number of members continue to decline (IFSTA, 1990).

There is also an adverse effect with the population swing of the young firefighters. As the young leave and rural areas become suburbia for others, the newcomers are not familiar with the “... concept of volunteers delivering emergency service and you can see the potential for a shortfall in the number of fire department volunteers,” (Carter, 1996, p. 115).

Another factor that continues to hamper the retention of employees is an external factor placing demands on all departments throughout America. The external dilemma is the fact communities are changing their expectations about the services that the fire department provides (Eudailey, 1994).

IFSTA has reported on this previously by stating “volunteers are burned out from increased responsibility,” (1990, p. 10). This issue needs to be handled with care with the welfare of the community and citizens in mind.

In an article by James Jones (1995) it is apparent that Burke County (North Carolina) Search and Rescue is hampered for a different reason. When something exciting is happening people want to volunteer their services. Once they find out what is required of them, many drop out. “Now there are minimum attendance requirements, minimum training requirements, hiring practices, ... ” states Chief Rosendahl (1995, p. 7). In the old days, the town siren would ring and the volunteers would show up to help. Now the demands are overwhelming.

The fire service has increased its training requirements “dramatically to cope with hazardous materials, the AWAIR safety law, Right to Know laws, bloodborne pathogens, EMS requirements, carbon monoxide calls and more,” (Rosendahl, 1995, p. 7). NFPA, OSHA, DOT and many more have made governmental recommendations and requirements that continue to be added.

There are several motivational theories that are believed to provide basic human needs. One conception is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow believed that a human has five distinctive needs. These needs change constantly. A person can not move to the next level until they have satisfied their needs at the level they are currently on. These needs are as follows:

- 1) Physical needs
- 2) Safety and security needs
- 3) Social needs
- 4) Esteem needs
- 5) Self-realization (Coleman, 1988, p. 130).

Chief Jack Snook and Dan Olsen (1989) outline a list of needs as the Rath and Burrell’s List of Needs. The following depicts that concept:

- 1) Belonging

- 2) Achievement
- 3) Economic Security
- 4) Freedom of Fear
- 5) Love and Affection (p. 85)

Snook and Olsen (1989) outline another list of human needs as Murray's List of Needs. The following consolidates the list as:

- 1) Abasement - to admit inferiority
- 2) Achievement - to accomplish
- 3) Affiliation - to please and win affection from a valued subject
- 4) Aggression - desire to overcome or fight
- 5) Autonomy - to be free
- 6) Counteraction - to overcome weakness
- 7) Defendance - to defend against assault
- 8) Deference - to conform or admire superiors
- 9) Dominance - to influence or control others
- 10) Exhibition - to be seen and heard
- 11) Harm avoidance - avoid harm
- 12) Order - to put things in order
- 13) Play - have fun
- 14) Rejection - to separate from negatives
- 15) Succorance - to have needs gratified by the sympathy of others
- 16) Understanding - to be understood (p. 85)

Whether it is Maslow, Murray, or Rath and Burrell's needs model, people have basic needs that must be satisfied. National Volunteer Fire Council could not agree more. They state that people join volunteer fire services because a basic human need is not being met in their regular careers and that they believe it can be met from volunteering as a firefighter (1996).

Burn out is the next obstacle that departments face. Authors Snook and Olsen explain that when there is not enough activity, members begin to leave. The opposite is true when there is a tremendous amount of calls and the exposure rate adversely affects long term employment. The employee reaches a point where the activity is no longer enjoyable, otherwise known as burn out (1989).

There is a continual rise and fall that is unavoidable regarding the burn out factor in volunteers.

Snook and Olsen explain this phenomena:

A volunteer will normally reach a plateau at a level where they and their families are comfortable. This will be an activity level which provides the volunteer with the participation that was expected and desired, but yet doesn't interfere with the rest of their life to the point where it causes significant problems. This plateauing normally occurs three (3) to four (4) months after the recruit graduates and usually continues for approximately nine (9) to twelve (12) months. At the end of a year's period (give or take a few months) a volunteer will usually start declining in performance level. The person or persons responsible for an individual or individuals within a program will need to take necessary steps to bring the volunteer's performance level back in line when this decline occurs. ... records and data should show increased performance to a point where a plateau is once again met. This decline will show up again in another nine (9) to twelve (12) month period The key is to monitor rise and falls

and inject new ideas, concepts, and programs to keep employees interested and enthused (1989, p. 92-93).

In the Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Service publication, David Chiaverini points out:

Effective community fire protection depends on the ability of fire companies like yours to recruit, train and most importantly, keep the key individuals. When a well trained volunteer leaves your department, the loss of his capability and resulting cost of training a replacement, even to meet minimum standards, can have a significant financial impact ... (1994, p. 6).

Author Chiaverini (1994) continues to address the problem by providing an alternative program to retain the volunteer.

Establish a program to recruit and retain your organization's volunteer firefighters. The most innovative method for this is a Length of Service Awards Program, or LOSAP. By offering a package of benefits based on years of active service, a successful LOSAP provides the necessary incentives and motivation your volunteers need to join the fire department and to remain active for many years (p. 6).

It is estimated that as many as 5,000 of the 27,000 volunteer fire departments have created retirement benefit programs (Blackistone, 1997). John Brenner of the Pennsylvania Fire Services Institute recognizes that it is "an important tool for retaining volunteers," (Blackistone, 1997, p. 116).

The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department (Harris County, Texas) began an incentive program in order to "encourage participation in training, meetings, and emergency responses, enabling the PVFD to provide more experienced, dedicated, and professionally trained firefighters," (Windisch, 1991, p.10). The department awards points for each response, each regularly scheduled training meeting, and each hour of training, thereafter. Annually a committee, made up of the administration, determines a minimum

point requirement. Based on a budget allotment, points are earned for money (1991). This is another way for a department to retain volunteers.

The Marion County Fire District #1 (Salem, Oregon) uses a combination of programs to retain their volunteers. They provide annual physicals and \$15,000 straight life insurance coverage with an additional \$10,000 for on-the-job coverage, for all volunteers. This along with “free housing (single rooms and cooking facilities in one of the fire stations) and college tuition to four students involved in fire or paramedic studies at a local community college,” assist in retaining employees (Garza, 1991, p. 60).

Not only are there direct monetary incentives, but there are internal non-monetary incentives that can be integrated into an organization. The National Volunteer Fire Council recommends that departments examine the following regarding training (1996):

- 1) Scheduled training - training must be scheduled in advance so people can plan around it.
- 2) Diversified Instruction - rotate instructors from other departments, or by rotating the location of the training among stations or training facilities. Have a variety of members teach occasionally.
- 3) Competitions - create an atmosphere of challenge and require everyone to maintain proficiency.
- 4) Reducing Training Requirements - training standards should not be set so high that they discourage volunteerism (p. 40-41).

Regarding time demands on volunteers, National Volunteer Fire Council recommends the following (1996):

- 1) Improving Efficiency - analysis of tasks to see if they can be done with less labor.
- 2) Narrowing Assignments - reduce the amount of assignments for which volunteers are responsible.
- 3) Selective Paging - assign special “reeds” in pagers which only alert volunteers when their special group is alerted.
- 4) Shifts - volunteers are more willing to devote a fixed time more than an open-ended amount of time.
- 5) Involve Family - include families to participate in fund-raisers, social events, and support functions.
- 6) Supplement Full-time Personnel - communities may be forced to hire daytime personnel to fill-in for the volunteers. This idea must be sold to the volunteers (p. 42-46).

The National Volunteer Fire Council states that recognition plays a major role in job satisfaction and retention. Volunteers need to be needed, but they should also be appreciated (p. 53). A newsletter that provides recognition from peers is a moral booster. A chief officer should send thank you cards to show appreciation for a job done well. Local newspapers should receive press releases when firefighters earn additional certifications or training from outside the organization. The newspapers should also be sent pictures of the firefighters doing their job (p. 54).

PROCEDURES

The research procedure used in this paper began with a literature review at the Learning Research Center (LRC) at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in June of 1998. Additional

literature reviews were done at the Lenexa (Kansas) Fire Department's Learning Resource Center (LRC), as well from the Internet between June and August 1998.

The literature research review focused on two specific areas. The first area of research concentrated on why there is a problem with people not wanting to volunteer. This search was intended to identify the problems that the volunteer fire service is facing and why employees can not be retained. The second area of research was devoted to locating reports or other publications that described successful retention programs and how they could be adapted.

Personal communications were conducted with Jerry Nulliner, Deputy Chief with the Town of Fishers (Indiana) Fire Department on June 21, 1998 and Ron Collins, Battalion Chief with the Hampton (Virginia) Fire and Rescue on June 23, 1998.

A review of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District's current Standard Operating Manual was completed, along with its Length of Service Awards Program manual.

A duty-time requirement policy (see Appendix A), developed by the Southern Platte Fire Protection District's chief officers, was introduced to the sample group (all volunteer employees of the Southern Platte Fire Protection District) in May of 1997 for their understanding and input.

Each employee was responsible to complete a duty-time log (see Appendix B) for each day in which duty-time was completed. Their respective officer then approved their time. The following day the duty-time was logged into a computerized database management system (Firehouse®). In the computer program the total daily duty-time was entered into the Staff Activity section for each individual, along with the paid firefighters daily attendance record.

Alarm activity was entered into the same program and section but as an alarm activity. The computer program was setup to default one (1) hour for each person that was entered for responding on an alarm.

At the end of each month, for the next thirteen (13) months, duty-time and alarm activity were tabulated and the results of the previous month were recorded. A computerized spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel 97®) was developed. The spreadsheet included the total sum of the duty-time and alarm time for each employee.

A statistical analysis of the tabulated sums was run for the organization. The statistics that were monitored were the maximum, minimum, standard deviation, median, amount of people over the required 18 hours, amount of people under the required 18 hours, and variance.

In order to provide an even closer model of the organization, a second statistical analysis was run. The second analysis included the above with one exception; the two (2) highest scores were eliminated, along with the two (2) lowest score. If a score was 0 (no activity for the month) it was one that was eliminated. Therefore, there were months when two (2) 0's were eliminated.

A review of the personnel records along with the data of personnel in Firehouse® were reviewed. The files were reviewed to determine if member disciplinary action, for not meeting duty-time requirements, decreased as the new policy was implemented.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

Alarm Activity Time - For every alarm that was responded to, an employee would receive one (1) hour credit.

Duty-time - Time that was spent at one of the fire stations doing departmental business. Most time should be a minimum of four (4) hour increments as outlined in Southern Platte Fire Protection District Standard Operating and Procedures Manual 2.8.2 (see Appendix A).

Limitations and Assumptions

Several factors and assumptions limited this research. The first assumption was that all duty-time log sheets were completed when an employee completed duty-time. It was further assumed that all persons reported the correct time spent and did so honestly. On occasions this was not an assumption and was corrected by the officer.

Another assumption was that employees reported all of their duty-time hours. It was further assumed that all log sheets were completed and turned in the following day and not after the final statistical analysis was tabulated. Although, neither of these assumptions could be corroborated.

The limitation of the department's lack of requirements for duty-time, during the period of 1993-96 provided research that was inconsistent. Therefore, the only measuring tool that could be monitored was that device after the policy was in effect. Because of the inconsistent data for the past time period, it is assumed that duty-time requirements were not as important as they are presently.

The next limitation was a lack of current reference material describing successful and innovative duty-time requirements and supported success programs. This limited the literature review primarily to Executive Fire Officer reports, journals, and personal communications with fire service leaders having a form of a duty-time or retention program in place.

RESULTS

Through the research the following questions were answered:

1. What are the issues, nationwide, of why volunteer firefighters/emergency workers do not continue to participate within their department?

The prominence of recent studies into why volunteers do not continue to participate indicates that the fire service is just putting a finger on the subject. It was found that a number of different fire departments, are faced with the same factors throughout. The common thread that appeared to be found in all the departments, is that each agency has had an idea of how to be proactive with employees at the beginning of their careers and reactive when they stop performing.

There are many underlying factors of why volunteers do not stay active within the department. One factor that is felt nationally is the population shift. As small towns have grown into suburban areas, families that once lived in the city are quickly moving to these areas. They are used to seeing a paid city department respond and take care of the needs of the city. They have no idea of the concept of volunteer fire departments.

Dual income families are a way of life for America today. Most parents are between the ages of 30-45 years. Both parents need to work in order to survive. This is causing a time constraint`

After people get home from working, the last thing they want to do is fight someone else's fire. Leisure time is at a high for all Americans. People get too caught up with their personal leisure time requirement, and do not have time for volunteer work.

Along with lacking free time to volunteer, citizens have lost community spirit. These people are too self concerned with the pursuit of careers and leisure time.

Another factor is that volunteers are burned out. Fire service associations and the government continues to place requirements on the fire departments and its employees. Along with NFPA, DOT and OSHA, the fire service employees are hampered with hiring practices, EMS requirements, drug testing, hazardous materials, ... and the list goes on and on.

2. Nationally, what helps retain a volunteer firefighter/emergency worker?

One study points out that the single most important thing to retain volunteer firefighters is the organization itself and the management of the organization. It is up to management to understand human wants and needs.

In the research, three theories of needs are noted. They are Malsow's Hierarchy of Needs, Rath and Burrell's List of Needs, and Murray's List of Needs. Every employee must have his or her own personal needs met. The fire service assists in meeting the needs of the individual.

An individual will volunteer at a volunteer fire department to fulfill basic needs that are not being met at their regular job. Management needs to be aware of these individual needs and assist them in obtaining the resources to achieve their needs.

Another facet that studies have confirmed, that has helped departments retain employees is the recognition of an employee's rise and fall in performance. When an employee starts his decline in performance; new ideas, concepts, and programs have be interjected to help keep the employee interested and enthused.

Length of Service Award Programs have provided departments another way of retaining its employees. In areas where a volunteer is not performing as needed, an organization is able to assign

more weight to that area. The employee will work harder at meeting the department's needs in order to receive financial benefits later in his career.

Monetary rewards are effective in the retention process if a department already is rewarding service with monetary rewards. If a department does not presently have a monetary system in place, they should not implement one. Retention will not improve by paying the volunteers that have never been paid before.

There are other reward programs that assist in retaining employees, which do not cost the volunteers anything. Annual physicals are important to some and very important to the organization and community. A life insurance policy for the volunteer benefits them and their family. Resident programs benefit the volunteer and the community by having a firefighter able to respond immediately while providing a place for the volunteer to live. In exchange for duty-time, a volunteer is given a place to live.

Other concepts that help with retention, as a study pointed out, are in the area of training. Training schedules need to be presented in advance of the training. Departments should diversify their programs and have different instructors teach different courses. Training can provide a form of competition between its volunteers. A reduction in the department's training requirements can also help with retention.

Requirements of time can aid in increasing volunteer involvement. An organization can reduce an individual's responsibility for an assigned program. Selective paging for fire calls will decrease the time that is required. Individuals can complete shift work that would enable them to schedule the time that is spent away from family. Another way that time away from the family can be reduced is to involve the family in departmental activities.

Another option that continues to work is for management to recognize its volunteers. This can be done in person or in front of the employee's peers. It can be done through personal thank you cards, internal newsletters, newspaper photos, and/or newspaper articles.

3. Under the present duty-time requirement system, within Southern Platte Fire Protection District, how has retention increased over the past year?

In the study, it has been determined that retention has increased over the past year, as outlined by disciplinary action and the termination of employees.

Monthly Disciplinary Action

Month	Written Counseling	Special Probation	Termination	Totals
June, 1997	0	0	0	0
July, 1997	0	0	0	0
August, 1997	6	0	0	6
September, 1997	4	2	0	6
October, 1997	3	2	0	5
November, 1997	4	0	0	4
December, 1997	4	3	0	7
January, 1998	5	1	1	7
February, 1998	3	2	1	6
March, 1998	3	0	2	5
April, 1998	5	1	0	6
May, 1998	5	2		7
June, 1998	2	3	0	5
TOTALS	44	16	4	64

Table 1

As seen from the table, the total disciplinary action taken remained low as the year progressed through the program, therefore, increasing retention.

Another factor that this study looked at in determining how retention increased was to determine if repeat offenders changed their behavior or were terminated.

Table 2 depicts the amount of individuals that received more than one of the same discipline type. Those that continued to receive discipline and then improved performance showed that they did want to stay involved, but could not make a full commitment to the organization.

Repeat Behavior

Type of Discipline	Once	Twice	Three Times	Four Times
Written Counseling	12	6	8	0
Special Probation	9	2	1	0

Table 2

As seen, individuals did push the system, but still performed over the year. They retained their employment and assisted with the community, but some lost their year of service that was to be credited toward their LOSAP.

4. What should the minimum requirement be for employees that want to volunteer their time to the Southern Platte Fire Protection District?

Table 3 delineates the statistical data of the employees without the deletion of data.

Monthly Analysis Without Deletion

Month	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation	Median	> 18	< 18	Variance
June, 1997	117	0	20.90	5	12	25	499.157
July, 1997	159.5	0	34.20	14	15	16	1169.708
August, 1997	83.75	0	23.66	14.5	18	13	599.9726
September, 1997	71.5	0	16.92	12.25	16	13	286.1781
October, 1997	68	1	16.12	19	24	5	259.7406
November, 1997	48	0	14.17	19.75	25	5	200.8308
December, 1997	79.25	0	18.33	18.5	21	8	336.1521
January, 1998	65.5	0	17.62	18.125	24	6	310.4017
February, 1998	109.5	0	20.83	17.5	25	4	434.0112
March, 1998	50.75	0	10.79	15	25	4	116.5291
April, 1998	54	0	15.21	12	17	12	231.2816
May, 1998	113	0	24.81	12.75	18	10	615.3945
June, 1998	115	0	24.58	19.5	21	7	604.1174
Averages	87.29	.07	19.86	15.22	20.07	9.85	435.6519

Table 3

Thus, from the averages of the statistical analysis, that did not eliminate any hours, the minimum time an employee should spend doing duty-time is 19.86 hours. If rounded to the nearest quarter hour, the minimum time should be 19.75 hours. It must be noted that this factor of 19.86 hours is based on only a thirteen (13) month study and the average of those months together.

When the statistical analysis is run again, based on the total of the data, the following results occur:

Total Analysis Without Deletion

Maximum	159.9
Minimum	0
Standard Deviation	20.75
Median	16
Variance	430.4231

Chart 1

Therefore, by not adopting to the average of the thirteen (13) months and statistically running all thirteen (13) months together, a more appropriate figure of 20.75 hours per month would be required.

Table 4 examines the second statistical analysis series run, which removed the two (2) highest and (2) lowest hours.

Monthly Analysis With Deletion

Month	Maximum	Minimum	Standard Deviation	Median	> 18	< 18	Variance
June, 1997	31	0	9.49	5	10	23	99.23715
July, 1997	75	0	29.16	14	13	14	406.3228
August, 1997	75.5	1	18.61	14.5	16	11	346.4712
September, 1997	34.5	0	8.02	12.25	14	11	64.25521
October, 1997	59	1	13.80	18.375	14	14	170.2317
November, 1997	47	1	13.15	19.75	23	5	172.8309
December, 1997	45.5	2	12.17	18.5	19	6	148.1994
January, 1998	54.25	1	14.42	18.125	23	7	208.0534
February, 1998	47.5	6	9.81	17.5	23	2	96.21604
March, 1998	34.5	5.5	7.35	14	23	2	54.00379
April, 1998	49	1	14.08	14.5	15	10	198.3505
May, 1998	63	1	13.87	12.75	16	8	192.3057
June, 1998	57	2	13.95	19.5	19	5	194.7387
Averages	51.75	1.65	13.68	15.28	17.53	9.07	180.8628

Table 4

Thus, from the averages of the statistical analysis, that did eliminate the two (2) highest hours and the two (2) lowest hours, the minimum time an employee should spend doing duty-time is 13.68 hours. If rounded to the nearest quarter hour, the minimum time should be 13.50 hours.

As previous, when an analysis is computed with all of the data, eliminating the two (2) high and two (2) low score hours the following results:

Total Analysis With Deletion

Maximum	115
Minimum	0
Standard Deviation	18.94
Median	16
Variance	358,7932

Chart 2

This analysis provides a different prospective towards the minimum duty-time that is required. By eliminating only the top two (2) and bottom two (2) score hours, instead of two (2) top and lowest two (2) for each month, the results provide a minimum duty-time requirement of 18.94. Thus, by rounding down to the nearest quarter hour, a requirement of 18.75 hours per month must be achieved.

Although, it can be answered, by eliminating the two extreme scores of hours, the statistical analysis from Table 4 should be used in determining the minimum amount of time that a volunteer should spend doing duty-time. Therefore, the minimum amount of duty-time should be 13.50 hours per month due to changes that each month brings.

5. How can this criterion be used to increase the retention of employees?

The study can be used to help increase the retention of employees in one simple way. Many organizations have used a form of a retention plan, which helps their organization provide a form of employee retention.

The most direct and least time consuming way to enhance retention is to realize that all of the activities, that are being used, can be tailored to other agencies. If the activity works in one agency, the common thread would be that the program should work in another; with some minor changes.

It will need to be determined what type of creative incentive plans the organization wants to implement and the resources that will need to be committed for the plan. The individual activities will need to be reviewed and implemented based on the future retention plan, or forms of them can be implemented to meet the needs of the employees and the plan.

DISCUSSION

Being proactive has been an intricate part of retaining employees for many fire departments over past economical times which has changed the volunteer fire service in the last twenty-five (25) years. Fire administrators have realized that they must continually change incentives in order to keep a good volunteer base.

The results of the study indicate that many departments, including the Southern Platte Fire Protection District, are providing activities that help the department with the problem of retention. However, as the research material indicates, a continual revision and re-evaluation of the activities can be even more positive towards employees and the length of their career.

This assumption is validated by the changes in the duty-time policy, implemented thirteen (13) months ago, and the addition of the Length of Service Awards Program, along with descriptions of successful activities conducted by departments throughout this country. These departments represent a wide range of size and geographical locations. However, despite the wide range of social attitudes and customs, several common factors contributed to the success of the activities. These factors included

aggressive usage of interaction between the organization and the employees. Even going as far as one on one retention.

The Southern Platte Fire Protection District can learn from the successes of some of these incentives. Even though the organization does perform some of the enticements, the organization should expand and improve upon those activities that work. It can also examine some of the other stimuli, determine if they can meet the needs of the employees, implement them, and evaluate the outcome.

As the Southern Platte Fire Protection District reviews the statistics further it will need to be determined if the new minimum hours of duty-time per month should be rounded down as it was for this research. It would be a higher goal that is to be achieved if the minimum was rounded up. This would provide more man-hours of protection to the community every month. The question to be answered would be whether or not employees would have enough present incentives to achieve the higher monthly goal.

The research should be taken to further levels. Thirteen (13) months is a short time period compared to the time the volunteer fire service has been in existence. One thing that all organizations should research is “Generation-X.” More and more employees that are new or have fewer than ten years of service fit into the “Generation-X” theory. This generation is too self-concerned and may not know or see the importance of the fire service. This effects volunteers and the amount of time that they want to participate. What truly entices this generation needs to be further researched and organizations need to develop plans that assist in developing these individuals into employees that are going to be there for the community, even if they don’t know it.

This study shows that there is no one set plan to retain employees. Therefore, the Southern Platte Fire Protection District should continue to take pieces of all of the activities that work well for others

and include them into a full program. The fire department that can adjust to providing different incentives and programs will be the department that is going to succeed with not only their internal customers, but also most importantly, their patrons. All fire departments, not just the Southern Platte Fire Protection District, should realize this.

Listening to the needs of the volunteer employees is an aspect that needs to be looked at further. Fire department officers think they know what is best for the employee and what makes them happy, because they were in those shoes once before. What we as chief officers sometimes forget is that times have really changed and maybe the management theories should be revisited more often.

In summary, not only is a wide range of enticements, programs, and incentives the key for the Southern Platte Fire Protection District to continue the improvement of retaining employees that will continue to participate, but listening to the employees is foremost. The programs need to be based on all of the employees' needs and expectations. Using one or two activities will only help provide some increase in participation. It will take time and will require several revisions for the program to work.

RECOMMENDATION

The research conducted revealed that while there has been some material published on retention, along with employee needs in the fire service and the success of the department, there is relatively little found on inclusive programs that achieved a marked success and how it was done. The activities that have been successful are encouraging. However, future research may reveal a more comprehensive answer to this problem. At this stage, successful activities share common components and it is on the basis of these components that the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Form a group, that includes a representative from each level and division, to participate in an employee needs assessment task force. Their mission will be to review employee needs and enticement programs, both successful and non-successful.
2. Have the task force meet with the employees and get their input into why some employees do not participate.
3. Evaluate the items of discussion, in detail.
4. Determine which incentives/enticements are presently working for the department. If an activity is not providing the best results it can, it should be evaluated and determined if it can be improved or if the activity should be eliminated. No new enticements should be contemplated until all of the present programs are evaluated.
5. Implement a Departmental Standard that provides a range of enticements and incentives that employees can pick from. This would be a plan enabling the employee to be enticed by activities that motivate him/her to participate.
6. Southern Platte Fire Protection District's chief officers should make a conscious effort to compliment the employees and thank them for their time and efforts that are given. This can be through numerous communication means.
7. Keep the present system of log sheets along with the policy, but change the duty-time requirement to a minimum of 13.50 hours. It will need to be explained to the membership of why the change is being made and how the old standard was too low. This can be done with the assistance of key employees in the organization. Sell these people first, then the rest of the employees, with their help.

8. Continue to keep statistics of the duty-time results for each month. Evaluate those results and determine if there needs to be another change of duty-time requirements. Do not change the requirement each month. Let at least one year go between each change, unless it is determined that the change needs to be made sooner due to a flux in people.

9. It should be reinforced to the company officers the importance of counseling those employees that do receive disciplinary action against them.

10. The officers should make a constant reminder to the employees, of the importance of who the employees serve (the customer/citizen). This must be done not only by spoken language, but must be demonstrated through all actions that the employee makes.

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APPENDIX A

SOUTHERN PLATTE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

DATE: June 01, 1997

NUMBER: 97-06

SUBJECT: Revision of SOP 2.8.2

PURPOSE

To ensure that the patrons are receiving a cost effective service in relationship to staffing while providing a minimum requirement for volunteer employment with the District.

POLICY:

It shall be the policy to provide staffing of well trained firefighters in an effective, efficient, and structured manner. Thereby providing better District coverage which is in the best interest of the people we serve.

GUIDELINES:

A volunteer employee will be required to meet the following criteria in order to remain an active employee in good standing.

1. Personnel will be required to meet monthly training criteria. This consists of one (1) EMS and one (1) FIRE training session. Those unable to make the Monday meetings will be able to review the sessions on tape. Those unable to make their "home station" meetings must advise and discuss the absence with their station officer.

2. Personnel are required to perform 18 hours of District activity. Hours can be achieved in any combination of the following ways:

- A. Up to 6 hours of regular scheduled training. Each session counts as 3 hours.
- B. One hour per alarm activity, regardless of duration or type.
- C. One hour per hour of shift time. Shift work is preferred and is to be scheduled in advance one week in four (4) hour increments.

All personnel will report wearing the required uniform and all personal belongings needed to complete the shift, as performed or stated throughout the Standard Operating Procedures and Policy Manual.

Those members who fail to meet the above requirements will be subject to disciplinary action, which can include termination.

The Fire Chief has the authority to waive the Guidelines on an individual basis as long as the purpose is adhered to.

APPENDIX B

SOUTHERN PLATTE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT NON-COMPENSATED DUTY REPORT

Name:	Date:
Time Arrived:	Time Departed:
Total Hours:	SS #:

Duty Coverage Performed At:

Station #1
Station #2
Station #3

Training or Duties Performed:

Signature: _____

Completed reports to be placed in shift officers mailbox at Station #3 by the end of the shift each day.